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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to investigate censorship attempts in Colorado during the period 1966-1975 by consulting issues of the "Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom" published by the American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freedom. Colorado's rate of censorship was found to be close to but slightly above the national average. Both educational and noneducational institutions were affected equally with 13 attempts each, with a sharp increase occurring in the 1970s. Fifty percent of the attacks occurred within a 50-mile radius of Denver. Parents were the largest source of complaints in schools; among the noneducational institutions no one source was responsible for censorship attempts. In Colorado, 42% of all censorship attempts were related to language, obscenity, and sex. Another frequently cited reason for censorship was racism. Forty-six percent of the censorship attempts were successful. (Lists are provided in the document of the kinds of institutions and the titles of the materials under censorship attack.) (MKM)

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PUTTING THE "SOUL ON ICE" IN COLORADO

Dr. L.B. Woods

Colorado was the second state in the union to grant women the right to vote when it ratified a women's suffrage amendment in 1893; the rest of the nation did not follow suit for another twenty-seven years. But how has Colorado fared more recently in protecting individual rights? A study at the University of Rhode Island's Graduate Library School investigated censorship attempts in Colorado for the years 1966-1975. The study focuses on (a) where censorship attempts occurred, (b) sources of the attempts, (c) reasons for the attempts, (d) the institutions affected, (e) materials censored and (f) the results of the attacks.[1]

During the decade covered, the Office of Intellectual Freedom of the American Library Association reported over 2,170 censorship cases for the nation. Of these, twenty-six or 1.19 percent, occurred in Colorado. The estimated population of Colorado in 1974 was 2,496,000 or 1.17 percent of the total U.S. population.[2] Dividing Colorado's percent of censorship attempts by its percent of the national population yields the state's censorship index of 1.02. Compared to the national average index of 1.00, it becomes evident that Colorado's rate of

[1] Data for the study was obtained from all issues of the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom published by ALA's Office of Intellectual Freedom from 1966-1975. This paper concerns only those cases reported in the Newsletter.

[2] Bureau of the Census estimate, 1974.

censorship is close to but slightly above the national average[3]

The study investigated censorship attempts in both educational and non-educational institutions. Both types of institutions were affected equally with thirteen attempts each.

TABLE I

Number of Censorship Cases Reported in Colorado, 1966-1975

Educational Institutions		Non-educational Institutions	
1966	0	1966	0
1967	1	1967	0
1968	0	1968	0
1969	0	1969	0
1970	2	1970	3
1971	4	1971	4
1972	1	1972	2
1973	0	1973	2
1974	1	1974	0
1975	4	1975	2
Total	13	Total	13

One pattern which emerged throughout the nation was a sharp increase in censorship attempts in the 1970s. This pattern also occurred in Colorado. Between 1966-1969, there was only one censorship attempt reported from the state. (It took place at a Denver high school.) The remaining twenty-five attempts, or ninety-six percent took place in 1970 or later. This was an even more dramatic increase than occurred in most states and demonstrates that Colorado either did not report

[3] An analysis of censorship nationwide can be found in L.B. Woods' two articles "For Sex: See Librarian." Library Journal 103 (1 Sept. 1978): 1561-6, and "The Most Censored Materials in the U.S." (1 Nov. 1978): 2170-3.

censorship attempts prior to that time or was not seriously plagued by censorship until the controversial attitudes of the 1970s took hold. These attitudes included a more permissive sexual code, increasing acceptance of abortion and homosexuality, and the use of explicit language.

TABLE II

Places of Censorship Attacks in Colorado, 1966-1975

Educational Institutions		Non-educational Institutions	
Boulder	1	Adams County	1
Canon City	1	Aspen	1
Collbran	1	Colorado Springs	2
Denver	5	Delta	1
Englewood	2	Denver	2
Greeley	2	Jefferson County	1
Lakewood	1		

In Colorado censorship attempts are reported more frequently in densely populated areas with fifty percent of the attacks occurring within a fifty mile radius of Denver. In addition, fifty percent of attacks occurred in cities of 50,000 people or more, and forty-two percent in cities with populations over 100,000. Conversely, only fifteen percent occurred in areas where the population was under 10,000.

TABLE III

Sources of Censorship Attempts in Colorado, 1966-1975

Educational Institutions		Non-educational Institutions	
Black Students	1	County officials	1
Citizen	1	Court	2
Committee on Publications and Info.	1	Director of T.V. Station	1
District Attorney	1	Landlord	1
Parents	5	Newspaper	1
School Administration	2	Police	2
School Board	2	Store owner	1
		Unknown	4

As is often the case in educational institutions, parents were the single largest source of complaints. Three complaints centered around junior high schools, one occurred at a nigh school, and one at a public school library. The first junior high school case occurred in 1972 when parents in Lakewood objected to the book Daddy was a Number Runner. The title was removed from the school library with limited use continuing in the classroom.[4] The second case took place in Englewood when the father of a student objected to The Water is Wide because of objectionable language and "irreverent use of God's name." The school board refused to ban the book, however, stating that parents can control reading material only for their own children.[5] The third attack by parents

[4] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 21 (May 1972): 71.

[5] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 24 (March 1975): 54.

on a junior high school occurred in Collbran in 1975. This objection was to a textbook, a seventh grade literature reader entitled Elements of Literature. The parents complained about violence and "grotesque" illustrations in some of the stories.[6]

A parent from Greeley objected to three books at a local high school in 1971. I Never Promised You a Rose Garden, Love Story, and One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest were attacked because of obscene language.[7] The final attempt by parents was aimed at the Englewood Public Library, their target being Beastly Boys and Ghastley Girls, a children's book which they claimed contained "needless violence" and "out and out gore." The librarian refused to remove the book from the library shelves and defended her decision by noting that the standard guides to children's literature all recommended the book.[8]

Among non-educational institutions, no one source was overwhelmingly responsible for censorship attempts. An unusual case involved the press, which is usually thought of more as a victim of censorship rather than a cause. Two newspapers, the Denver Post and the Rocky Mountain News both refused to carry an advertisement which urged a boycott against a food company planning to construct a plant to process animal products. The papers claimed the ad was biased.[9]

6 Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 25 (January 1976): 10.

7 Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 20 (May 1971): 59-60.

8 Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 24 (March 1975): 54.

9 Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 20 (May 1971): 66.

TABLE IV

Reasons for Censorship Attempts in Colorado, 1966-1975

Educational Institutions		Non-educational Institutions	
Blasphemous	1	Biased	1
Critical administration	2	Language	1
Language	3	Libel	1
Obscene	1	Obscene	5
Political	1	Political	1
Racism	2	Protect rights	1
Sex	1	Time consuming	1
Violence	2	Not given	2
Not given	1		

A large number of reasons for censorship attempts usually relate in some way to sex or obscenity. In Colorado language, obscenity, and sex accounted for eleven attacks or forty-two percent of all attempts.

Another frequently cited reason for censorship was racism. In November 1970, Soul on Ice was removed from the curriculum at a Greeley high school. The district school board decided the book was "not necessary in the teaching of races."[10] In 1974, the editor of a state college newspaper in Denver was suspended for publishing an article critical of black students and the school's black studies program. The suspension was initiated after complaints by black students.[11]

[10] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 20 (May 1971): 60.

[11] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 24 (March 1975): 42.

An interesting reason for censorship was cited in a case involving the Denver Cervi Journal. The paper desired access to the birth and death records from the Jefferson County Health Department. A District judge ruled that birth and death records must be made available only to those with a direct tangible interest. His reasoning was that compilation of lists for the news media was too time consuming.[12]

TABLE V

Institutions Affected by Censorship Attempts in Colorado, 1966-1975

Educational Instititions		Non-educational Institutions	
College	3	Bookstore	3
High School	2	Magazine shop	1
Jr. High Library	1	Person	1
Jr. High School	3	Press	4
Public Libraries	2	Salesmen	1
Public School	1	Theaters	2
University	1	TV Station	1

In 1973 a man was arrested for wearing the American flag sewn to the seat of his pants; he was charged with desecration of the American flag. The Colorado Supreme Court ruled that statute under which he was arrested unconstitional.[13] In 1971, five magazine salesmen were

[12]Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 20 (Sept. 1971): 109.

[13]Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 23 (January 1974): 17.

arrested in Denver and charged with possession of pornography. The judge in the case later dismissed the charges because she felt the court lacked enough testimony to determine whether the magazines were obscene by community standards. Also in 1971, the director of television station KRMA in Aspen refused to air a segment of the Public Broadcasting Service series Artists in America. The decision was a reaction to the program's "extreme and excessive profanity."[14]

[14]Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 20 (November 1971): 129, 123.

TABLE VI

Materials Under Censorship Attack In Colorado, 1966-1975

Educational Institutions

Books:

General Titles:

Anti-American Books
Catcher in the Rye
Daddy Was a Number Runner
I Never Promised You a Rose Garden
Love Story
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest
Soul or Ice
The Water is Wide

Children's:

Beastly Boys and Ghastly Girls

Textbooks:

Elements of Literature

Film:

I Am Curious Yellow

Newspaper:

Campus:

The Paper (Metropolitan State College)

People:

Editor (Southern Colorado State College Newspaper)
Editor (Metropolitan State College Newspaper)

Miscellaneous:

graffiti on school blackboards

TABLE VI, Cont.

Non-educational Institutions

Magazines:

Duo
Eclipse
Harem
Jaybird Happening
Obscene photos in magazines
Sex Nest
Wild Couples

Newspapers:

Colorado Springs Sun & a reporter
Delta County Independent
Denver Cervi Journal
Grand Junction Sentinel

Films:

unspecified obscene film

T.V. Show:

Artists in America

Businesses:

Theaters (2)

Miscellaneous:

Advertisement advocating boycott
Obscene material

Person:

Donald P. Vaugh (wore American flag sewn to his pants.)

In 1970, three citizens accused the Denver Public Library of containing "anti-American books" which promote riot and revolution. The library would not remove the books and the city refused to interfere with the library's selection policy.[15] Of other books censored in educational institutions, the most censored book in the nation was among them: Catcher in the Rye was restricted as a teaching tool in Denver public schools in 1967. The city school board announced that students and teachers who objected to the book were not required to read it.[16]

The Paper, a campus publication of Metropolitan State College was censored for printing an article entitled "Stay Home and Masturbate." The Committee on Publications and Public Information suspended the newspaper temporarily until a new editor could be found.[17] Graffiti was also censored. At a junior high school in 1975, school officials fired a teacher who allowed students to scrawl graffiti over the blackboards. The graffiti apparently expressed negative sentiments about the school's principal.[18]

[15] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 21 (March 1972): 40.

[16] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 16 (Sept. 1967): 66.

[17] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 20 (Sept. 1971): 105.

[18] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 24 (May 1975): 86,89.

Among non-educational institutions, the magazines, films, and theaters were all censored for obscenity and in December 1975, a judge prohibited two newspapers from publishing photographs of two men accused of murder. After the judge conferred with a lawyer who represented the papers, The Delta County Independent and the Grand Junction Sentinel, he lifted the ban.[19]

TABLE VII

Disposition of Censorship Attacks in Colorado, 196?-1975

Educational Institutions		Non-educational Institutions	
Successful Attacks	5	Successful Attacks	7
Unsuccessful Attacks	4	Unsuccessful Attacks	5
Partially Successful	2	Partially Successful	0
Unknown	2	Unknown	1

Successful attempts resulted in materials being banned, unsuccessful attempts resulted in materials remaining accessible to whomever wished to use them, and partially successful attacks resulted in restricted access. Educational institutions experienced a thirty-eight percent success rate for censorship attempts and a thirty percent failure rate. Non-educational institutions had a fifty-three percent success rate and a thirty-eight percent failure rate. The combined statistics for both types of

[19] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 25 (March 1976): 39.

institutions indicate that forty-six percent of censorship attempts were successful, thirty-four percent unsuccessful, approximately eight percent partially successful, and the results of the rest unknown or not reported by the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom.

Conclusion

Colorado's censorship index is just a fraction higher than the national index. Does this indicate that the respect for individual freedoms and rights, which in 1893 prompted the state to grant women their voting rights, has diminished? Undoubtedly, there were many people who would have liked to supress the issue of women's suffrage in 1893 because it was contrary to traditional religious and social values. Yet if they had succeeded, what we today believe is a fundamental right could have been indefinitely or permanently withheld. With censorship on the increase, society is running the same risk of depriving citizens of their fundamental rights, the rights to read, view, express themselves, and think.